

County Meeting  
May 18, 2023, 6:00pm  
Minutes  
Union County Courthouse

The meeting was called to order by Commissioner Lamar Paris at 6:04 pm. The Commissioner welcomed everyone to the meeting. The invocation was then given by David Dyer, Fire Chief/EMA Director and the Pledge of Allegiance was led by Bill Walker. The minutes from the April 20, 2023 County Meeting were approved as presented. Attendees were provided with copies of the minutes.

Commissioner Paris accepted an agreement between Convergent Technologies, LLC and Union County for annual fire alarm and sprinkler system testing and inspection in the Union County Courthouse. This agreement has an effective date of June 1, 2023 for a duration of three years in the amount of \$2,831.00 per year.

The Commissioner accepted an agreement between Legacy Link and Union County for the required local share during FY-2024 in the amount of \$105,000.00. This is the amount Union County has committed in local funds to help operate the Senior Center from July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2024. There was no cost increase from last year to this year. Commissioner Paris thanked Kathy Hill and all those that work at the Senior Center along with those that deliver Meals on Wheels.

Commissioner Paris accepted an agreement between the Georgia Department of Corrections and Union County for three work details for the period of July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2024. The cost for these details is \$49,316.00 per detail totaling \$147,947.00 for the term of this agreement. This is for the detainee crews that Union County uses for maintenance throughout the county along with road maintenance, golf course maintenance, buildings and facilities maintenance and picking up trash. If all three details are not available to work the cost to the county is adjusted accordingly per the agreement. So, Union County is only required to pay for the crews that are used. The contract amount is if Union County has all three crews available for the entire year. In the past, our contracts with the detention center have been for six detainee crews, but unfortunately, they do not have the staff and crews available to meet that amount. The contract will now reflect a more reasonable number of crews that may be available.

The Commissioner announced that the agenda provided to attendees had an incorrect date related to this agreement. The start date of this agreement is June 1, 2023 versus July 1, 2023 as shown on the agenda. Commissioner Paris then approved a contract between Freeman Gas and Union County for propane services in the amount of \$1.377 per gallon from June 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024. Last year's rate was \$1.89 per gallon so the cost per gallon has decreased by 0.51 cents per gallon. Union County Government receives a discounted rate for their propane pricing due to the volume of propane used by Union County, which on average is 100,000 gallons per year.

Commissioner Paris accepted a grant awarded to the Union County Fire Department from FM Global in the amount of \$1,187.00 to purchase fire prevention equipment, materials and accessories. Banners and a portable sound system were purchased with this grant. These items will be used when the Fire Department goes to the schools and childcare facilities to educate students and children on fire safety. While Fire Department staff's main function is fire protection in the county, they are also looking for other ways they can be helpful in the community. Commissioner Paris thanked Chief Dyer and staff.

The Commissioner approved a Notice of Award of contract dated May 18, 2023 for a Rescue/Quick Attack Fire Apparatus to Custom Truck & Body Works, Inc. in the amount of \$172,415, plus additional custom items selected by the Union County Fire Department in a pre-construction conference. This will be the main rescue vehicle for Station 1, and it has the capabilities of carrying water and a pump, which makes it dual purpose. This is not a fire engine, but a rescue vehicle. This is just the box; the chassis will be an additional purchase of around \$60,000. This new rescue truck will be replacing the main rescue truck that is at Fire Station 1 currently. The old one will be transferred to Station 13 once the new one is received. The old rescue truck will have 55,000 to 60,000 miles when transferred and they generally last about 8-10 years. This rescue vehicle is being funded by SPLOST.

Commissioner Paris made some comments regarding things that are going on in Union County currently. Those comments are summarized as follows:

Union County held a Litter Clean-up Contest a couple of weekends ago. There were eight teams that picked up 356 bags or 3,060 pounds of litter during this contest and cleaned up a lot of roads in the county. Union County also has an Adopt a Road Program. Citizens can come by the Commissioner's Office and talk to Jennifer Mahan to sign up. Those that sign up are provided the supplies to use including bags, grabbers, and safety vests. Union County is working on scheduling their annual Electronics Recycling and Document Destruction Event for later in the year. It should be in September or October. Union County is considering doing glass recycling at the Recycling Center. Right now, glass is accepted, at a total loss. Union County is currently looking into a glass shredding machine which could cost around \$200,000. This machine shreds the glass, making it into a sellable product. It can be used with concrete mix or asphalt mix. The cost of the machine versus what it can do for the county will be evaluated.

The Recreation Department right now has baseball, coaches pitch, softball, and t-ball going on. The number of children participating has went from around 300 participants to over 500 participants in one year. The kids and parents are having a great time, most of the time. The adults exercise programs have gone from around 45 participants to over 200 participants this year. The purpose of the Recreation Department is to provide what the citizens need as far as recreation is concerned. A fishing event was held over at Woody Gap for catching trout. There is also going to be another one at Byron Herbert Reece in the next couple of weeks. The USFS is going to stock the creek there. The pool is opening Memorial weekend. The deep freeze in the winter caused some cracked lines but they are being repaired and the pool will be ready by opening day.

The Scottish Festival is in June, and the Butternut Creek Festival is in July, and the Sorghum Festival will be in October. The Farmers Market will open on June 3<sup>rd</sup>, the first Saturday of June. The Cannery will open in July. The Car Club had their first car show the previous Saturday and they will be there the first Saturday of each month.

The Short-term Rental Ordinance is in effect. Renee Deibert and Laura Jenkins are in the process of getting everyone registered. It is not near as concerning as everyone thought it would be, and everything is working well so far.

The LMIG projects are underway. This is the Local Maintenance and Improvement Grant awarded to Union County from the State of Georgia. Union County is responsible for 30% of the cost and GDOT is responsible for 70%. Union County was awarded \$1,820,729.38 in LMIG Funding this year and Colwell Construction got the bid to do the paving.

Commissioner Paris shared some negative news. The liability insurance for Union County, which covers properties and vehicles, is through ACCG (Association of County Commissioners of Georgia). They notified Union County that the cost of insurance will be going up an estimated 30% this year. ACCG's year starts on July 1, 2023 and since Union County operates on a calendar year, this increase falls right in the middle of the county's budget year. While the cost of insurance coverage is going up everywhere, the Commissioner stated that he was not happy about this. The cost will go from around \$350,000 for the year to \$440,000.

The Commissioner wanted to remind everyone of some of the services that were available to citizens. Union General Health System is a large multi-faceted healthcare organization that own twenty-two affiliated facilities including two hospitals, one in Union and one in Towns County, two nursing homes, a wellness center, walk-in clinic, specialty clinic and much more. Union General Health Systems offers a number of other services, including ambulance services and the emergency helicopter service. The county pays half and the hospital pays the other half of the cost for the helicopter service. If you are a resident, either full-time or part-time, and have an emergency that requires the use of the emergency helicopter, insurance pays first, whatever is left over and not covered by insurance is covered by this program. They also have behavioral health, cardiology, cardiopulmonary rehabilitation, emergency room, endoscopy, lab services, medical and surgical inpatient unit, non-emergency transport, orthopedics, outpatient care, psychiatric services, pediatrics, radiology, rehabilitation services, respiratory therapy, sports medicine, surgery center, swing bed services, urology, women's health, wound care, and a hyperbaric center. Union General Health System just completed an expansion of their medical campus with a new 44,000 square foot, three story, medical office building. The first floor of the new building houses Union General Orthopedics and Sports Medicine. It includes two x-ray rooms, 20 exam rooms, a casting room and a procedure room. The second-floor houses Union General Women's Health and has fourteen exam rooms, two ultrasound rooms, and two procedure rooms. The third-floor houses Piedmont Hospital, which leases this floor. Parking was increased by 300 spaces. It is amazing this type of facility is in rural Union County. This expansion allows Union General Health Systems to offer further services to the citizens while simultaneously increasing jobs within the community and they currently employ 1,211 people.

The Pat Haralson Intersection is a busy intersection and is always very crowded with a lot of traffic. It was decided that a roundabout would be constructed to make this intersection easier and safer to get through for both emergency services and citizens. Union County worked with the Georgia Department of Transportation to receive a \$1,000,000 grant for this project and Union County will probably have to put in close to the same amount. Pam Hawkins, Purchasing Agent for Union County, stated it should go out for bid in about four months. All utilities go through this intersection so during the design phase input has to be given by all utility providers on how and where to relocate the utilities.

The College and Career Academy is a Union County School facility and is located across from the new gym. This facility opened in the fall of 2022 and was built in order to train the future workforce within our region. The facility was designed with input from the regional industry and post-secondary partners. The programs offered at the College and Career Academy have been developed over the last several years to meet the workforce needs within our region. There is a shortage of workers in construction, fast food and other fields. The school is having to work on building a new elementary school now to accommodate the increase in student numbers. The school system was awarded over \$350,000 in equipment grants for this facility. The efforts of the school district,

industry, and post-secondary partners will have a lasting impact on workforce development withing Union County and our entire region for many years to come by giving student the skills they need to succeed in their employment or career choices after graduation. The students are currently working to help build an entire house for Habitat for Humanity. They are learning skills from carpenters, plumbers and electricians during the construction and the house should be done soon. Once completed it will be ready to be moved to the house site.

Union County Government took over the Transfer Station after Advanced Disposal sold out to Waste Management. The county has updated and streamlined bag disposal and has also upgraded the commercial disposal side of the Transfer Station as well. The recycling center has also been upgraded and the county is moving toward being able to take more recyclable items than they currently do. The recyclables that are currently accepted are cardboard, paper, aluminum, plastics, and glass. The Convenience Center on Highway 325 takes everything that the main Transfer Station does, and the Convenience Center on the north end of the county on Moccasin Road does also. The Moccasin Road facility has compactors that allows the county to compact the items they receive and not have to haul it as often. This facility has been a benefit to citizens on the north end of the county and it also helps decrease traffic at the main Transfer Station. When the Pat Haralson Roundabout is under construction it might be difficult to get to the main Transfer Station for a couple of weeks, so these Convenience Centers could help with that problem as well.

Windstream received a grant for broadband expansion in Union County and they held a Public Hearing a couple of weeks ago. Windstream will be adding fiber to make broadband available to about 8,600 additional homes in the county. This grant was for \$11.6 million, and Windstream is adding around \$8 million to this construction project. According to Pam Hawkins, Purchasing Agent for Union County, the county contributed \$500,000 as part of the \$11.6 million. Blue Ridge Mountain EMC is also working on expanding their broadband service as well.

Fire Station 13 is under construction on the northside of the county on land that was donated by a developer for the purpose of a new fire station. This will be a full-time manned fire station and there will be enough space for a deputy and ambulance to be stationed there as well. This station will decrease fire and medical response time by 8 to 10 minutes and this decrease in response time will help citizens who are having a fire or medical emergency. This added fire station will also help with the Insurance Service Organization rating for this area. Fire Chief, David Dyer, said that if a home is further than five highway miles from a fire station insurance companies consider you to not have any fire service at all. Fire Station 13 being constructed will decrease the ISO rating for 200-300 homes in this area and can result in a decrease in insurance cost by about 75%. The main Fire Station, Station 1, currently has six full-time firefighters on staff.

The Commissioner then spoke about the construction of the new Election Facility next to the new Sports Complex. Currently early voting is held in the Union County Courthouse, which impedes daily operations at the courthouse during election time. There is also not enough space to adequately get people in and out in a time manner during early voting. In addition, there is no place for early voters to wait to vote out of the weather. So, when it is raining or cold, everyone is standing in the rain for extended periods of time. There is also currently not enough room for the Voter Registration Offices and the Election Offices to be located in the same facility, which is often problematic for citizens. This new facility that is under construction will house Voter Registration and Elections. There will also be an area large enough for early voting and day of voting. The county is hopeful this will allow them to consolidate some of the voting precincts, but this is up to the State Elections Offices. Rumors have been circulating that the third gym that is going to be built between the new

double gym and the new election building will not fit and will not be built. Commissioner Paris assured everyone that this third gym will fit between the two facilities and will be utilized for voting. When not in use for voting, it will be used as an additional gym for use by the Recreation Department.

The Commissioner went on to state that is talking about all that is going on in Union County and all the work that is being done, it is unbelievable all the work that the county employees are doing. Employees were given a pay increase last year and this year to bring them up to market level, and the Commissioner said the county was blessed that most of the employees have stayed. This includes the Sheriff's Office, the Fire Department, and the Road Department. He went on to say that Union County Government has great public service personnel.

The Commissioner and the Road Department met with a company that has new road patching equipment that they provided a demonstration of. This equipment is not cheap by any means, but the county and the Road Department are going to see if there will be funding for this piece of equipment in the future.

Commissioner Paris stated that Union County has no debt and that is something to be proud of. This comes from employees, and from citizens paying their property taxes and purchasing things in the county to contribute to the sales tax. When you combine the school and county mil rate, Union County has the 3<sup>rd</sup> lowest mill rate out of all 159 counties. If there is a house in Union County valued at \$100,000 and one valued in a South Georgia county valued at \$100,000, the one in South Georgia might pay triple the taxes.

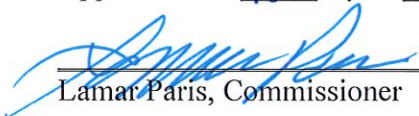
The Commissioner closed by thanking all the county departments again, for all their hard work.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 6:53 pm.

Respectfully submitted by:

  
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Jennifer Mahan, County Clerk

Approved this 15<sup>th</sup> day of June, 2023

  
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Lamar Paris, Commissioner